



STATE OF NEGLECT

Displaced Children in the Central African Republic



SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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November 2008

Summary and Recommendations

Executive summary

In July and August 2008, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) conducted a fact-finding mission to the Central African Republic (CAR) to research and report on the protection and assistance needs of displaced children.

Internally displaced children in CAR face severe protection problems from ongoing insecurity and violence. They have suffered trauma after witnessing extreme levels of violence such as the killing of family members when their villages were attacked by road bandits known as Zaraguina or coupeurs de route. During these attacks, some displaced children, including girls, have been abducted to work as porters of stolen property or kidnapped for ransom. Many others have been recruited into armed forces or groups, and processes for their release are delayed due to a stalled peace process and because proper protection and rehabilitation programmes have yet to be funded and launched.

The nutrition, water and sanitation, health, and shelter needs of CAR's displaced children remain largely unmet. Many are in urgent need of adequate shelter, having been forced to sleep outdoors during the rainy season, exposed to higher risks of contracting malaria or respiratory infections. Displaced children face economic exploitation as they are forced to work in fields belonging to host communities in exchange for food or meagre pay. Finally, displaced children from minority groups such as the Peuhl face ethnic discrimination, not least because many host communities have the mistaken perception that all Peuhl are road bandits.

The government of CAR and the international community have not adequately addressed these protection concerns, for various reasons. The government lacks a specific policy and legal framework to protect IDPs in general, and internally displaced children in particular; and state security and social services are almost totally absent in the north of the country. International humanitarian organisations have not focused specifically on displaced children's needs, and so have been unable to meet them in timely and efficient ways; and a wider presence of child-mandated organisations working on the ground is urgently needed in areas of displacement. It will take a concerted effort on the part of both the government and the international community in CAR to redress this state of neglect.

A window of opportunity has opened for CAR in the form of increased development funding for 2009, including \$600 million pledged at a landmark donor meeting in Brussels in October 2007, to be disbursed over the next three years. Humanitarian funding for CAR increased tremendously in 2008, and by the end of the year the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) may prove to be one of the best-funded in the world (it was 91 per cent funded at the time of publication of this report). Development and humanitarian funds must be used to give displaced children in CAR an opportunity to rebuild their lives after the devastating effects of violence and neglect.

Recommendations

To the government of CAR

- Re-establish and strengthen the presence of the state in the north of the country by restoring social services that provide health care, water and sanitation, and education, and by providing security through training, equipping and deploying security forces to protect displaced communities from further attacks by road bandits.
- End government support and training of community self-defence militias in the north of the country. Ensure that these militias release the children who they have recruited.
- Implement the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as a framework for providing protection and assistance to IDPs, including through the enactment of national legislation, in accordance with state obligations under the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in Africa's Great Lakes Region, and its Protocol on Protection and Assistance to IDPs (Article 6).
- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.
- Revise the draft child protection law to include provisions for protecting displaced children, and submit it to the National Assembly for enactment.
- Work closely with UNICEF to determine if there are children under the age of 18 in the Central African armed forces, and if so, release them in accordance with international obligations.
- As part of security sector reform, revise training materials used by security forces to include comprehensive training on child protection and the rights of displaced people to prevent the recruitment of children into armed forces.
- Strengthen the National Human Rights Commission by allocating adequate funding, and by making the necessary changes to its statute and mandate to bring it into line with the Principles Relating to the Status of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (the Paris Principles). Ensure that the Commission includes the human rights of IDPs, and in particular of displaced children, in its work.

To APRD, FDPC and UFDR

- Release all children under the age of 18 currently serving in armed groups, and end further recruitment and use of children in accordance with international obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 1612 and with discussions held with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in May 2008.
- Uphold individual ceasefire agreements signed with the government. Actively engage in the peace process by returning to the negotiating table with the government to resolve contentious provisions of the General Amnesty Law.

To the UN Peacebuilding Commission and its Country Specific Configuration for CAR

- Encourage all parties to conflict in northern CAR to uphold ceasefire agreements and to engage actively and constructively in the peace process.
- Call for the government to end its support and training of community self-defence militias in the north to carry out security functions legally reserved for the army, gendarmerie and police.
- As part of the Commission's efforts to rebuild communities affected by conflict and in order to prevent a return to violence, provide timely funding to programmes that focus on improving the living conditions of displaced people, including children, and conduct periodic monitoring to ensure that funds reach their intended beneficiaries.
- As part of the Commission's promotion of good governance, rule of law, and security sector reform, fund protection training programmes for security forces and local authorities that include child protection components.

To the UN Peace-Building Support Office in CAR (BONUCA) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

- Provide technical support to the government for strengthening the National Human Rights Commission by bringing it into line with the Paris Principles, and by including the human rights of IDPs, and in particular of displaced children, in its work.

To the UN Security Council

- Ensure that any UN peacekeeping force authorised to replace EUFOR troops in March 2009 has a strong child protection component and gives high priority to protecting displaced people, including children.

To donor governments

- Support the efforts of the government of CAR to re-establish social services and security in the north of the country, either through bilateral assistance or through the UN Peacebuilding Commission.
- Increase funding to UN agencies and humanitarian organisations for assistance programmes that improve the living conditions of displaced people, including children.
- Encourage the government of CAR to implement the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, including provisions for the protection of displaced children, into law, and to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

To the UN country team in CAR

- Deliver humanitarian assistance to displaced people most in need, such as displaced children living in Kambakota, and preposition food and non-food items in a timely and efficient manner.

- Consider the specific needs of displaced children when conducting humanitarian assessments in areas of displacement, and when launching profiling exercises.
- Prioritise protection and assistance programmes designed specifically to improve the living conditions of displaced children in CAR.

To OCHA

- Appoint a Humanitarian Coordinator as soon as possible, to ensure a coordinated response to the needs of IDPs, including children, and to continue strategic lobbying for much-needed humanitarian resources and international visibility of the crisis in CAR.
- Include information on the protection of displaced children in the IDP advocacy campaign to be launched in CAR in 2009.

To UNHCR

- Prioritise the provision of technical assistance to help the government of CAR implement the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, including provisions for the protection of displaced children, into national law.
- In collaboration with UNICEF, train the CARITAS humanitarian observers who currently monitor the situation of IDPs in the provinces of Ouham and Ouham-Pendé to also gather specific information on the protection and assistance needs of displaced children, including those from minority groups such as the Peuhl.
- Deploy a roving IDP protection officer in areas of displacement to monitor and report on the protection and assistance needs of displaced people, including children; recruit an international NGO to manage the IDP site in Kabo and support returns as they occur.
- Disseminate the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement more widely, especially the version in Sango, to provide IDP communities and associations with information about their human rights.

To UNICEF

- Ensure that the country task force created to implement a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1612 addresses the concerns of NGOs that confidential and sensitive information could be made public, potentially jeopardising the safety of NGO staff and beneficiaries; and makes certain that staff working on the collection of information are adequately trained to monitor and report on violations committed against children. MRM should not be initiated in CAR until these conditions are in place.
- Provide technical assistance to the government of CAR to ensure that it revises the draft child protection law to include provisions for protecting displaced children, and submits it to the National Assembly for enactment.
- Create a child protection working group to ensure that child protection concerns are addressed in all clusters activated in CAR.
- Include the specific needs of girls and survivors of sexual violence in the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes currently being developed.

- In collaboration with the government, respond to urgent water and sanitation needs in areas of displacement. For example, rehabilitate the wells in the town of Kambakota, drilled by UNICEF in 1985 and currently in disrepair, to provide potable water for IDPs and host communities, and in parallel ensure community-based management of the wells.
- In collaboration with the government, respond to urgent health care and education needs in areas of displacement. For example, distribute urgently needed medical supplies and school materials to partners working in health care and education, respectively, and conduct periodic and effective monitoring of distribution processes.